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SUBJECT: FIRST GOVERNMENT SHELTER FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
VICTIMS

¶1. SUMMARY: Queen Rania inaugurated a shelter for victims of domestic abuse in Amman, to be run by the Ministry of Social Development. The shelter provides emergency housing for abused women over fourteen years of age and their young children. The shelter is the first government-run facility of its kind and offers specialized services that a smaller, privately-run women's shelter does not. It is the only facility in Jordan that provides both shelter and counseling for domestic violence victims. End Summary.

¶2. The Ministry of Social Development used a USAID grant to renovate and furnish a building in the East Amman neighborhood of Marka. Poloffs visited Al Wifiq Family Shelter for Victims of Domestic Violence on January 30 and met with its director Ms. Amal Azzam. The three-floor building is modern, well-equipped and can house between thirty five and fifty women. It is heated, and includes a physical exercise room with exercise equipment, several kitchens, a colorful play room for children, computer lab, library, T.V. room, meeting room and several single bedrooms with cots for the children of the abused. The target group is women over fourteen years who have been exposed to physical, sexual and psychological violence committed by any member of their families. Azzam expressed concern about the day-to-day operating costs. She mentioned that the Ministry was renting the property and said that their annual budget was not fixed as it depended on the number of cases received.

¶3. The shelter is run by a six-member team of trained social workers and is overseen by a fourteen-member committee including officials from the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Family Protection Unit of the Public Security Directorate and NGOs. The committee is headed by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Social Development Hussein Abu Al Ruz.

¶4. The shelter has not received any abused women since its opening on January 17 but has provided counseling to several victims of domestic violence. The shelter provides emergency and temporary housing for abused women over fourteen years of age and for their young children. It received several complaints via its hotline and conducted awareness campaigns in Ajlun, Jarash and Irbid. It started advertising its services through societies and charities in several governorates and, according to Azzam, has been well received by the public.

¶5. The basic programs offered at the shelter include family counseling (including for the male abuser), rehabilitation programs, vocational training programs, a "Productive Kitchen" (whereby the women participate in small businesses in order to become economically independent), health advice, legal services, and referrals to the Ministry of Social Development for assistance with small grants to establish small businesses. It can house emergency cases for 24-72 hours in group rooms and offers temporary accommodation in

single rooms or suites for periods ranging from three to six months. NOTE: Azzam said al Wifiq, which is not a police facility, would not supplant the role of the police, who sometimes take into protective custody women who are in danger of becoming victims of so-called honor crimes. END NOTE.

¶6. The al-Wifaq shelter has a well-trained staff and can accommodate a larger number of abused women than the one NGO-managed shelter run by the Jordanian Women's Union (which can house six women). A third facility, Dar Al Khansa' Rehabilitation Center in Ruseifa is not specifically meant for victims of domestic abuse, although some do stay there.

¶7. Comment: The al-Wifaq shelter was impressive and offers many heretofore unavailable resources for abused women. Women's activists have long awaited the establishment of such a shelter in Jordan to provide badly-needed refuge and counseling for victims of domestic violence, a subject that was once shunned in public discourse but is now discussed more openly and freely, at least in Westernized circles and in liberal media. End Comment.

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